N° 84. SATURDAY, *September* 9, 1786.

Conclusion of the Story of Father *Nicholas*.

I Was a coward, however, in the wrong as well as in the right, and fell upon an expedient to screen myself from a discovery that might have saved me. I contrived to deceive my wife, and to conceal my visits to Madame de Trenville's, under the pretence of some perplexing incidents that had arisen in the management of those affairs with which I was intrusted. Her mind was too pure for suspicion or for jealousy. It was easy even for a novice in falsehood, like me, to deceive her. But I had an able assistant in Delaserre, who now resumed the ascendency over me he had formerly possessed, but with an attraction more powerful, from the infatuated attachment which my vanity and weakness, as much as her art and beauty, had made me conceive for Madame de Trenville.

It happened, that just at this time a young man arrived from our province, and brought letters for Emilia from a female friend of her's

in

in the neighbourhood of Saintonges. He had been bred a miniature-painter, and came to town for improvement in his art. Emilia, who doted on her little boy, proposed to him to draw his picture in the innocent attitude of his sleep. The young painter was pleased with the idea, provided she would allow him to paint the child in her arms. This was to be concealed from me, for the sake of surprising me with the picture when it should be finished. That she might have a better opportunity of effecting this little concealment, Emilia would often hear, with a sort of satisfaction, my engagements abroad, and encourage me to keep them, that the picture might advance in my absence.

She knew not what, during that absence, was my employment. The slave of vice and of profusion, I was violating my faith to her, in the arms of the most artful and worthless of women, and losing the fortune that should have supported my child and hers, to a set of cheats and villains. Such was the snare that Delaferre and his associates had drawn around me. It was covered with the appearance of love and generosity. De Trenville had art enough to make me believe, that she was every way the victim of her affection for me. My first great losses at play she pretended to reimburse from her own private fortune, and then threw her-

self

ſelf upon my honour, for relief from thoſe diſtreſſes into which I had brought her. After having exhauſted all the money I poſſeſſed, and all my credit could command, I would have ſtopped ſhort of ruin; but when I thought of returning in diſgrace and poverty to the place I had left reſpected and happy, I had not reſolution enough to retreat. I took refuge in deſperation, mortgaged the remains of my eſtate, and ſtaked the produce to recover what I had loſt, or to loſe myſelf. The event was ſuch as might have been expected.

After the dizzy horror of my ſituation had left me power to think, I hurried to Madame de Trenville's. She gave me ſuch a reception as ſuited one who was no longer worth the deceiving. Conviction of her falſehood, and of that ruin to which ſhe had been employed to lead me, flaſhed upon my mind. I left her with execrations, which ſhe received with the coolneſs of hardened vice, of experienced ſeduction. I ruſhed from her houſe, I knew not whither. My ſteps involuntarily led me home. At my own door I ſtopped, as if it had been death to enter. When I had ſhrunk back ſome paces, I turned again; twice did I attempt to knock, and could not; my heart throbbed with unſpeakable horror, and my knees ſmote each other. It was night, and the ſtreet was dark

and

and ſilent around me. I threw myſelf down before the door, and wiſhed ſome ruffian's hand to eaſe me of life and thought together. At laſt the recollection of Emilia, and of my infant boy croſſed my diſordered mind, and a guſh of tenderneſs burſt from my eyes. I roſe, and knocked at the door. When I was let in, I went up ſoftly to my wife's chamber. She was aſleep, with a night-lamp burning by her, her child ſleeping on her boſom, and its little hand graſping her neck. Think what I felt as I looked! She ſmiled through her ſleep, and ſeemed to dream of happineſs. My brain began to madden again; and as the miſery to which ſhe muſt wake croſſed my imagination, the horrible idea roſe within me,—I ſhudder yet to tell it!—to murder them as they lay, and next myſelf!—I ſtretched my hand towards my wife's throat!—The infant unclaſped its little fingers, and laid hold of one of mine. The gentle preſſure wrung my heart; its ſoftneſs returned; I burſt into tears; but I could not ſtay to tell her of our ruin. I ruſhed out of the room, and, gaining an obſcure hotel in a diſtant part of the town, wrote a few diſtracted lines, acquainting her of my folly and of my crimes; that I meant immediately to leave France, and not return till my penitence ſhould wipe out my offences, and my induſtry repair that

that ruin in which I had involved her. I recommended her and my child to my mother's care, and to the protection of that Heaven which ſhe had never offended. Having ſent this, I left Paris on the inſtant, and had walked ſeveral miles from town before it was light. At ſun-riſe a ſtage-coach overtook me. 'Twas going on the road to *Breſt.* I entered it without arranging any future plan, and ſat in ſullen and gloomy ſilence, in the corner of the carriage. That day and next night I went on mechanically, with ſeveral other paſſengers, regardleſs of food, and incapable of reſt. But the ſecond day I found my ſtrength fail, and when we ſtopped in the evening, I fell down in a faint in the paſſage of the inn. I was put to bed, it ſeems, and lay for more than a week in the ſtupefaction of a low fever.

A charitable brother of that order to which I now belong, who happened to be in the inn, attended me with the greateſt care and humanity; and when I began to recover, the good old man miniſtered to my ſoul, as he had done to my body, that aſſiſtance and conſolation he eaſily diſcovered it to need. By his tender aſſiduities I was now ſo far recruited as to be able to breathe the freſh air at the window of a little parlour. As I ſat there one morning, the ſame ſtage-coach in which I had arrived, ſtopped at the

the door of the inn, when I ſaw alight out of it the young painter who had been recommended to us at Paris. The ſight overpowered my weakneſs, and I fell lifeleſs from my ſeat. The incident brought ſeveral people into the room, and amongſt others the young man himſelf. When they had reſtored me to ſenſe, I had recollection enough to deſire him to remain with me alone. It was ſome time before he recognized me; when he did, with horror in his aſpect, after much heſitation, and the moſt ſolemn intreaty from me, he told me the dreadful ſequel of my misfortunes. My wife and child were no more. The ſhock which my letter gave, the ſtate of weakneſs ſhe was then in, had not ſtrength to ſupport. The effects were a fever, delirium, and death. Her infant periſhed with her. In the interval of reaſon preceding her death, ſhe called him to her bed-ſide; gave him the picture he had drawn; and with her laſt breath charged him, if ever he could find me out, to deliver that and her forgiveneſs to me. He put it into my hand. I know not how I ſurvived. Perhaps it was owing to the outworn ſtate in which my diſeaſe had left me. My heart was too weak to burſt; and there was a ſort of palſy on my mind that ſeemed inſenſible to its calamities. By that holy man who had once before ſaved me from death, I was placed

placed here, where, except one melancholy journey to that ſpot where they had laid my Emilia and her boy, I have ever ſince remained. My ſtory is unknown, and they wonder at the ſeverity of that life by which I endeavour to atone for my offences.—But it is not by ſuffering alone that Heaven is reconciled; I endeavour, by works of charity and beneficence, to make my being not hateful in its ſight. Bleſſed be God! I have attained the conſolation I wiſhed.—Already, on my waſting days a beam of mercy ſheds its celeſtial light. The viſions of this flinty couch are changed to mildneſs. 'Twas but laſt night my Emilia beckoned me in ſmiles; this little cherub was with her!"——His voice ceaſed,—he looked on the picture, then towards Heaven; and a faint glow croſſed the paleneſs of his cheek. I ſtood awe-ſtruck at the ſight. The bell for Veſpers tolled—he took my hand—I kiſſed his, and my tears began to drop on it.—"My ſon," ſaid he, "to feelings like yours it may not be unpleaſing to recall my ſtory:—If the world allure thee, if vice enſnare with its pleaſures, or abaſh with its ridicule, think of Father Nicholas—be virtuous, and be happy."

Z